

School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

1001 1417358

BX  
8495  
S55  
R5



The Library  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE  
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA







---

# BISHOP SIMPSON.

BY

H. B. RIDGAWAY, D.D.

[From the **Methodist Review**, January, 1885.]

---



Engr'd by H. H. Hall & Sons 52 Fulton St. N.Y.

Yours truly  
M. Simpson

8495  
555  
25

# METHODIST REVIEW.

---

JANUARY, 1885.

---

## ART. I.—BISHOP SIMPSON.

THE first century of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America began with the consecration and episcopal services of Francis Asbury, the typical Methodist Bishop; it closes and culminates in the useful and brilliant career of Matthew Simpson, than whom no man of his age has more sincerely served God and his race, or more highly honored the great office to which the suffrages of his brethren had called him. If our episcopacy had its root and stock in the sturdy Asbury, surely in the eloquent Simpson it found its full flower and fruit. It is doubtful if any other Bishop in dying has left the office more luminous or fragrant.

Matthew Simpson, D.D., LL.D., was born at Cadiz, the county-seat of Harrison County, Ohio, on June 21, 1811, and died in Philadelphia, Pa., June 18, 1884. He was the son of James and Sarah Tingley Simpson. His father was a native of the north of Ireland, and was of Scotch-Irish descent. What English Puritans did for New England, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians did for many sections of our Middle and Southern States, and both were good stocks for Methodist grafting.

James Simpson, on arriving in this country, landed first at Baltimore, Md., and thence emigrated when a young man to south-eastern Ohio. Here he married Sarah Tingley (descended from a French-English family of New Jersey), who also emigrated to Ohio about the same time. Soon after Matthew's birth, Mr. Simpson removed with his family to Pittsburg, Pa. A year later the father died, and Mrs. Simpson, with her infant son, returned to Cadiz, and thenceforward

the training of young Simpson was under the guidance of his mother and of Mr. Matthew Simpson, the paternal uncle whose name he bore. The mother was a devout Christian woman, of plain dress and affable manners. She possessed strong native sense, associated with a vivacious temperament, and much of the *naiveté* peculiar to the French. Mr. Matthew Simpson was well qualified, as an educated Christian gentleman, to be the instructor and guardian of the boy. A close biblical student, reading the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew, a school teacher, a representative man in his county, a constant and active member of the Methodist Church from his early youth, he was in all respects fitted to give bent to the mind of the future Bishop; and so the lad grew, under the fostering nurture of the mother's love and the uncle's wisdom. After receiving such academical training as Cadiz could afford, he was sent to Madison College, Pa., which had recently come under the patronage of the Pittsburg Annual Conference, and of which the Rev. H. B. Bascom, D.D., then in the height of his fame as a pulpit orator, was the president (1827-1829). The good uncle meant, no doubt, to be loyal to the new Methodist College; but likely he was equally drawn by the eloquent Bascom, who was now the pride and joy of all Methodists. Young Simpson's mind was fit tinder for the sparks which flashed from Bascom's blazing intellect.

Such was young Simpson's proficiency in his studies, that at the early age of eighteen years he was made tutor in the college. Having determined to become a physician, he returned to Ohio. There—it is not sure just where—he studied medicine, and had entered upon its practice when, under a powerful conviction of duty, he was led to change his course, and to accept license to preach as a Methodist local preacher. He was "received on trial" by the Pittsburg Conference in 1833, and appointed to the circuit where he lived. He was rapidly advanced to charges in Pittsburg and Monongahela cities. In 1837 Madison College was absorbed by Allegheny College, located at Meadville, Pa., in which he was elected vice-president and professor of natural philosophy and chemistry. In 1839 he was elected president of the new Indiana Asbury University (now De Pauw) at Greencastle, Ind. After remaining here nine years, laying deep and broad foundations for the

institution, he was elected by the General Conference of 1848 editor of the "Western Christian Advocate," and removed to Cincinnati. He was a delegate to the General Conference of 1844 at New York, and also to that of 1848 at Pittsburg, and was again returned as a delegate to the General Conference of 1852 at Boston, by which body, on the twenty-fifth day of its session, he was elected to the office of Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was then within a few weeks of the completion of his forty-first year; being, with the exception of Bishop Janes, the youngest man ever elected to that office.

His subsequent residences were successively at Pittsburg, Pa., Evanston, Ill., and Philadelphia, Pa.; but according to Methodist law and usage he was a General Superintendent, a Bishop eqnally wherever the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church extended. He presided over the Annual and General Conferences in rotation with his associate Bishops, fixing the appointments of the preachers to their several charges of ministerial work, and also traveling abroad, as he was designated by his colleagues, into foreign countries, wherever the Church had established missions. In addition to his strictly official routine work must be reckoned his well-nigh countless sermons and addresses on ordinary and special occasions, his private conversations and counsels, his social and political interchanges of thought and courtesy. The record would fill many large volumes; and the least which we may expect, at a convenient opportunity, is one good volume, or more, which will embody in fair and just proportions his life-work.

The most that can be required in an article so brief as this is an attempt at determining somewhat the historical position of our great and good Bishop. But only an attempt; for it is yet too early to do more. We are still in the shadow of that moving, vital, well-nigh overpowering personality from which we cannot easily emerge, so as to be able to look at him calmly and clearly. A man at the foot of a great mountain must get away from its base far out upon the plain if he would measure its proportions. Should this Review notice fall into eulogy, it will be of a piece with every thing and every body who came into close contact with the man—his spell is upon the writer. Bishop Simpson was the most truly representative man and minister of American Methodism in the last half century. As

such he has not only impressed himself more strongly upon his times than any of his contemporaries, but his influence is destined to be more distinctive and controlling for succeeding generations than that of any one of them. And if the most truly representative minister of American Methodism, why not of the American Church? Modesty may, perhaps, forbid us to press this question: it is therefore only suggested. If, in the providence of God, our Methodist Bishop was brought to the front of the hosts of American Christians, and did more deeply impress their mind and shape their action than any other living minister, to God only be the glory. He was the common property of all believers in Christ. Certainly, as the foremost preacher and officer of the numerically largest Protestant denomination of the land—as a theologian of sound and evangelical belief—as a Christian of the most catholic spirit—as a citizen of the truest patriotism—as a philanthropist in warm and wide sympathy with all that concerns the welfare of his fellow-creatures—as a man of affairs always just and prudent—as one of the people touching them every-where by the magnetism of his presence—and as a preacher illumining, stirring, and charming all alike by the force of his ideas and his eloquence, to none did he stand second. What other man of all the Churches has so completely embodied all these attributes? Some may have been more profound and accurate theologians; others more varied and riper scholars; others, again, better informed and more active humanitarians; and still others of more original and pronounced ideas and better judges of law; and there may have been even those whose eloquence at times was more incisive and searching; yet who among them all united in such harmony all these qualities, any one of which is enough to make a man distinguished? If it is asked, Wherein lay his greatness? after possibly the mention of his oratory, first of all, one would be as liable to point to any one thing for which he was remarkable as to another.

But dismissing the question of his relative position in the Church at large, as Methodist Episcopalian probably there will be no dispute among us in conceding to him the highest niche in our ecclesiastical temple. We have known other men and ministers who excelled him in some one thing, and who may have had, owing to certain favoring conditions, more direct

influence personally in molding the opinions and shaping the conduct of men. It would be hard for the old students of Basson, Olin, Durbin, McClinton, Thomson, and a few more who might be mentioned, to acknowledge the superior power of any man to these men, especially in the particular relations in which they were so intimately known; but when all is granted which is claimed for these, at some point they fall short of Simpson's influence. Either their gifts were less universal or their spheres were more limited. They may at some time have moved with equal brightness in their orbits, but not always so uniformly, and their rounds were more circumscribed.

The office of a Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church affords grand opportunities for commanding moral and religious power. It cannot make a small man great, though even here men of comparatively moderate talents, who have been invested with its functions, have been raised, at least temporarily, to an influence incalculably beyond what they could have attained without it. There are men, highly influential before being elected Bishops, whose real power is not thereby enhanced, simply because they were better adapted to their former sphere than to this. All men cannot be equally successful, and cannot equal their former successes in altered circumstances. A man whose success as an educator, a book agent, a secretary, an editor, a pastor, or a presiding elder, is unquestioned, and even brilliant, may comparatively fail as a Bishop. He may make a good and acceptable Bishop, but fall short of the same standing in his new vocation which he had in his old. There may be a want of adaptation, or he may lack the magnitude to fill the office to the utmost. Bishop Ames once asked a presiding elder how he was getting on. When answered, "Very well," he rejoined, "Ah! a presiding elder's district is about the right size, but the episcopacy is too big." When a statue is to be placed high, as on a portico or a tower, it must be of such size as to compensate for distance and relations, otherwise it will appear diminutive and incongruous. It had better be down on the ground and near the beholder, for its own sake as well as for the general architectural effect.

I recollect that some years ago Dr. Abel Stevens, in one of his live discussions on men and measures in the Church, with characteristic freedom mildly expressed regret for the election

of Drs. Ames and Simpson to the episcopacy. He claimed that they were so tied up by ecclesiastical laws and usages that their influence would be correspondingly curtailed. They could not participate, as before, in the debates of the General Conferences, or be outspoken on public questions, or any more be leaders of reforms. This was the drift of his argument. But has the sequel approved his judgment in Bishop Simpson's case? It was not possible that Matthew Simpson could be wholly repressed in any position. His individuality would have asserted itself in making things move wherever he might be placed, and he must have been a leader and at the front under any circumstance. But he had the instinct, the training, and the magnitude for a Bishop. When he was consecrated a Bishop, as Sumner said of Chase when Chase was sworn in as Chief-Justice, "A shaped block of granite was hoisted to its place."

The episcopal office is not to be judged simply by its disciplinary functions, although these, as showing the lowest view of its capacity for good, present unusual opportunities. If a Bishop should accomplish no more than the giving of correct decisions on points of law, and adjusting the preachers and charges to each other, a very important trust would be discharged, and the results might be sufficiently far-reaching to render the agent in so vast a work mighty for God. But if, in addition to these, he possesses capabilities not defined by the Discipline, and which may be regarded as incidents of the office, such as the ability in the charmed circles of society both by private talks and public addresses to inspire men with a resistless energy, and lift them upon a higher plane, and set them a-going on new and world-wide enterprises, it must be admitted that he magnifies the office almost indefinitely.

Bishop Simpson, all will allow, entered into and discharged all the essential and accidental functions of the episcopacy with entire success. He found much in the office, and he gave to it as much as he found. It offered him full scope for all his powers, and his powers magnified it. This gem of first water found its proper setting. No one who knew him, or who will hereafter know the truth of him, can ever speak slightlyingly of the Methodist episcopacy. Such a one must acknowledge its consummate grace when occupied by a man whose many-sidedness measured up to its capacity.

No amount of work Bishop Simpson could have rendered the Church, however excellent in quality, would have compensated for a failure in the legal requirements of his office. There is not the least evidence that his eminent services as an orator, or as a man of affairs, ever led him to slight the official duties of his position as General Superintendent. Nothing that he did was done more satisfactorily than his work in what has come to be known as the *cabinet*. In making the appointments of the preachers, no Bishop was more patient and painstaking, more thoughtful of the welfare of both pastors and people, or more judicious in his allotments. He was accessible to the least church or the least preacher. Indeed, far from repelling, he ever invited all freely to approach him, and to say what was in their hearts. He desired to do the best for all parties, and he needed all possible light to direct him. And somehow, there was that utter self-abandonment and frankness which awakened confidence in the most timid preacher who might go to him with any personal burden or perplexity about his appointment. No doubt he sometimes made mistakes (and no one was more ready to acknowledge them than he), yet evidently his disciplinary work at the close of each Annual Conference over which he presided bore the impress of the soundest judgment. If he did not excel some others in this delicate and difficult department, he was unquestionably the equal of any. Only a very few of his law-decisions or rulings have ever been reversed. Sometimes a question has been raised as to the strict legality of some of his appointments, as in the case of the People's Church in Boston; but here it is admitted that he acted according to the equity of the case, and under the shield of high necessity he took responsibility, at the risk of creating a precedent. If he ever swerved from the letter of the law, it was not because he did not know differently, but because knowing, he would, under the behests of the extremity, press the law to the utmost verge of allowableness. The garment was more important than a few of its fringes, the temple than some of its pinnacles or griffins.

Touching the lowest round of the official ladder, he was an example of punctuality, of promptness and attention to details in the dispatch of business, and in meeting the requirements of devotional exercises, both private and public. In all these

things there was no evidence of undue haste, nothing erratic or bordering on eccentricity—all was calm, deliberate, equable, and firm. When his humblest engagements were fulfilled, no apology had to be offered that any thing was improperly done or omitted under the plea that genius is impulsive, and necessarily forgetful of, or indifferent to, little things. Undoubtedly these little things were sometimes irksome—for his great soul must have been most of the time occupied with high thoughts—but they were regarded as indispensable parts of life's work, and as a thoughtful, good man he had schooled himself to do what was fitting and wholesome.

While Bishop Simpson thus performed, with the utmost fidelity, the plainest work of his office, he rose with the occasion, as this office opened its broader opportunities. A Methodist Bishop is the accredited head of his denomination where he resides, and wherever he goes; and as the representative of his people he becomes, tacitly at least, an important person, not only in his own denomination, but also in general society and in the State. Leadership is conceded to him, and he is looked to as a guide, a quickener, as well as a conservator, in all laudable enterprises. Bishop Simpson was born to lead. With a profound insight into human nature, a clear perception of the principles and motives governing men, an accurate discrimination in all questions affecting human destiny, and with convictions as strong as his discriminations were just, with a sincere love for progress arising from a yearning for personal improvement and corresponding advancement in those about him, he could not be still—he must go forward, and see others go forward. From a young man he had the courage of his convictions, and after he became Bishop, the man was not lost in the office; he still had thoughts and dared to express them. Repression of opinion or discussion was never his policy for himself or for his brethren. There was no seal upon his lips, simply because his heart was hot within him, responding in quick pulsations to the claims of humanity. He never seemed to think that he had any need to nurse either his dignity or his consistency. He would converse freely with the laymen, and with the youngest ministers of the Church about the most delicate and perplexing matters, after which his determinations were usually cheerfully accepted.

His caution was also equal to his courage ; perhaps each contributed largely to the other. Where did he ever speak a rash word or do a rash act ? He was no agitator for agitation's sake. His mind was rather constructive than destructive. He would build up rather than pull down. If he saw a vicious principle in a system he would do as the skillful workman would do by a faulty stone or plank—prop and brace the sound materials about it, and then cut it loose and draw it out, rather than ruthlessly knock down the whole building. And yet when the case required it he could deal weighty blows against wickedness, spiritual or otherwise, though enthroned in high places.

His brave spirit and consummate tact as a leader were never more highly displayed than in the lay representation movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Convinced that the principles of lay participation in the highest councils of the Church was a correct one, and also that the men who were advocating it were sincere and loyal Methodists, instead of standing aloof from them, under the plea that the functions of his office were wholly executive, and that by favoring them he might offend more than he would please, he joined them. With no ambition but the glory of God and the prosperity of the Church, he at once gained the intelligent confidence of the gentlemen who were determined upon the reform ; and such was his ascendancy over them that by a tacit consent he received from them the assurance that under no circumstances of provocation or delay would they secede from the Church. "Another secession!" That charge was nailed to the counter. Under his inspiration the lay delegations were the most loyal of the loyal, shouted more vociferously for the fathers and old-fashioned Methodism than all their brethren. He earnestly deprecated the possibility of violence and rashness. These brethren were, he believed, equally lovers of the Church with those who differed from them in judgment, and sought only its good. Hence he urged kindness, consideration, patience ; old and honest prejudices were not to be instantly overcome. Thus while the advocates of lay representation appreciated the kind utterances of the Bishops in their successive quadrennial addresses, and while they respected the studied silence which some maintained as individuals during the controversy, they

were not slow to admit that they owed the early triumph of their cause largely to the advocacy of Bishop Simpson.

He was one of the first to pronounce in favor of higher ministerial education; to lead off in the improvement of church architecture among us; to countenance such arrangements as would tend to foster the social life of the young, and to bind them more closely to the Church. It was a grief to him to see so many of the children of our oldest and best families drifting away from Methodism as though there was not enough in the Church of their parents to satisfy them. Hence while he ceased not to emphasize whatever is peculiar to Methodist doctrine, experience, and polity, he also sought to harmonize these with the highest intellectual and social culture. He took great pains to cultivate the friendship of the young people of our leading families, as the destined social forces of the Church. He argued that if Methodist teaching and usage lifted men upon a higher plane, there ought to be nothing antagonistic in this usage and teaching to the religious life upon this plane. The prosperous and educated classes could as well be Methodists, if they correctly understood Methodism, as members of any other Christian Church. Methodism was to him the best realization of the kingdom of Christ on earth, and hence he thought it best suited to embody his highest ideas of redeemed humanity. It was strong enough and wide enough to sustain and comprehend all the varied fruits which were the product of its inherent vitality. It had made him all he was; under its wholesome care every generous aspiration of his nature had been nurtured; consequently it grieved him deeply to see the children of earnest Methodists turn away from the Church which had nourished their fathers and mothers, and so given them respectability.

While Bishop Simpson was a sincere patriot, and would undoubtedly have gone into public life had he not been a minister of the Gospel, and while much that he did for his country in the way of counsel and advocacy was from pure love for the nation and humanity, yet he was not indifferent to the position of the Methodist Episcopal Church as an important factor in public affairs. He not only wished that the influence of this great denomination, in the action of its individual members as citizens and in its position as an organization, should uphold

the country, but he was also jealous of the honor of the people of whom he was a constituted leader. Though by nature timid, and the last to push himself, yet conscious of the underlying support of a great denomination he did not hesitate, when called upon by the General Administration, to offer advice in the hour of peril, and to accept for Methodism appropriate honors in the time of triumph. It is well known that Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stanton admitted him to their counsels in the conduct of the war, particularly in its civil aspects; and that not alone because they understood his power with the people, but because also they found him to be a disinterested and judicious friend. He could be trusted equally to calm the tumult or fire the hearts of the masses, and to speak wisdom in the councils of princes. The steadfast and intimate friend of the great and good martyr President while he lived, the personal relation as well as the national reputation of the Bishop was recognized in that he was called upon to deliver the funeral sermon at Mr. Lincoln's burial. All who knew Bishop Simpson will remember how sincerely in this regard, as well as in his speeches on great occasions and his public and private efforts for the Sanitary and Christian Commissions, he served his country; but at the same time he was truly glad to have the Church which he loved as the apple of his eye, brought to the front, and recognized in the loyalty which it felt and the sacrifices it made.

But after all that may be said of the excellency of Bishop Simpson as a man and an administrator, the one real and immediate cause of his ascendancy was, *his power as a preacher of the Gospel*. Burning with the love of Christ and the love of man, he preached as but few men of this age or any other have done. Though admitted to be a good average scholar and a sensible, devout Christian, it was his preaching which first brought him into prominence among his brethren, and sustained him in that prominence almost to the close of his life. Many years ago a certain professor of a Western college said to a distinguished teacher in the East, as they were discussing the great preachers of Methodism, "We have out in Indiana a man named Simpson who can outpreach them all." It would be difficult to overstate his popularity with the Hoosiers in those earlier days, when he was president of the Indiana

Albany University. The anecdotes of his pulpit and platform triumphs would make a volume in the annals of sacred oratory. Wherever he appeared crowds gathered about him, and he would preach with such wondrous influence that it was not uncommon for the great multitudes to be wrought up to the highest pitch of ecstasy or anguish. His name became a household word throughout the State. He moved eastward to Ohio, and in Cincinnati, as well as in all the regions round about, the same remarkable fees followed. Called farther east, by his election to the episcopacy, and going up and down the Atlantic States from Maine to Maryland, whether he stood before the cold and philosophical New Englanders, the versatile descendants of the Knickerbockers of New York and New Jersey, the plain and quiet Friends of Pennsylvania, or the thoughtful and emotional Baltimoreans, it was all the same; everywhere triumphs awaited him. All classes heard him gladly, and he was by common consent ranked with the first preachers of the nation. The rank then assigned him was never afterward disputed. Such success must have been based on solid merits. Many western meteors have flashed across the eastern horizon only as quickly to disappear in darkness; but this man, a star of the first magnitude, when he had once risen steadily, shone on in his place till the final setting in death. There may be, here and there, a few who never felt, and consequently never admitted, his transcendent power, but they must be regarded as exceptions to the rule. As common sense is the best sense, so the common judgment of mankind is the best test of excellence in preaching.

In attempting to account for Bishop Simpson's pre-eminence as a preacher, it must be considered, first of all, that he recognized preaching as the great business of his life. He was called of God to be a preacher long before he was called of the Church to be a Bishop. This call was, like his conversion, radical and abiding. It so possessed him that it left nothing in him unappropriated. Hence preaching could never be treated as secondary, or accessory to something else, much less as an accident of his vocation. It was the one thing of all others to be done with his might. This was the grand absorbent which drew in, dissolved, and assimilated all the resources of his affluent mind. God converted his soul and said to him, "Go,

tell it ;" and he began to tell it, and he went on telling it. There was to him no fact, with its correlations, so important as this ; not alone was it fresh when it first took place, but the freshest of all truths to his latest day ; and to proclaim it was the necessity and joy begotten of its irresistible impulse. Though he grew in intelligence, station, fortune, and fame, he never grew away from his early conviction of the supreme dignity and importance of preaching. When, therefore, he stood before the people "to speak the words of this life," whether in the backwoods or the metropolis of the land, he did the best of which he was capable. His estimate of the pulpit he has himself indicated in the Yale lectures : "It seems to me that the possibilities connected with preaching have been only partially realized, and that a bright and more glorious day will dawn upon the Church." This thorough absorption not only led him to bring all his acquirements to the pulpit, but it impressed his audience with such a sense of his moral and professional earnestness as predisposed them to a favorable hearing.

This view of the work of preaching as the one grand engagement of his life led him uniformly to preach for the highest results. "If you would be eloquent," said the venerable Dr. Tyng, "preach always as if you were in a revival." Thus, by both a spiritual and artistic instinct, Bishop Simpson, brushing aside all trivialities, seized upon, as the staple of his discourses, the great fundamental truths of the Gospel. Such themes as sin, atonement, salvation, the harmony of natural and revealed law, the final triumph of Christianity, and kindred topics, were those he usually discussed with all his energy of mind and heart. This sort of selection as to his subjects guaranteed an order of discussion which could not fail to be worthy the attention of the most cultivated among his hearers. He never failed to impress an audience by the quality of his thought as well as by the sincerity of his purpose.

The subject-matter of his discourses owed much of its impressiveness to the mode of its expression. It might possibly be affirmed that no one can be an original thinker who has not imagination, for imagination is the faculty by which old truths are seen in new lights, by which relations between a well-understood order and an order not so well understood, or hitherto

not at all, are brought to view. It is the creative faculty that clothes dead things with life, and makes the tame and commonplace facts of existence fresh, realistic. This faculty Bishop Simpson possessed to a wondrous degree. Fancy, too, he had. He could describe a scene or a thing with great accuracy and with the delicate touches of a landscape painter. But his *forte* was original perceptions that all-seeing imagination before whose blaze hidden things fall open as the quartz dissolves into its elements before the blow-pipe. The mind of the hearer likes this mode of putting thought. It excites wonder and secures assent; it entertains while it instructs. There was in all his sermons marks of a great intellect. The effect produced by them was not that which results merely from exciting the emotions, but rather that which comes of a thorough conviction of the understanding. Beginning with a statement of truths held in common by the natural and spiritual man, upon these as a foundation he builded the superstructure, carrying the judgment of the hearer with him in every step of the ascent until he reached the conclusion; a culmination in which not only the harmony of natural and revealed religion was seen, but the infinite superiority of the latter was triumphantly vindicated. Thus in every sermon, whether by design or instinct, there was unity, movement, cumulation. One leading idea gathered about it all subordinate ones, and grew by their contributions until it expanded into one magnificent whole of evangelical truth. And usually when this grand *finale* was reached his hearers were captured—the spiritual man rejoiced and the natural man assented.

And yet with all these qualities—his devout piety, honesty as a man, logical precision, affluence of imagination, and his single purpose to save men—the core of his preaching is not quite touched, nor the hidden springs of his power detected. To understand what it was that gave his preaching its charm you must go back of its subject-matter, and its merely intellectual and religious character, to the genius of the man. He was by nature an orator. Heaven had endued him with the gift of thinking, feeling, and speaking *eloquently*. What this means who can define? If asked what is beauty, one may reply that it is unity in variety, fitness, the evolution of forces, etc., but none of these will fully answer; and yet we all *feel* beauty when

we see it in an object or a thought. It is alike difficult to tell what poetry is, though we say many things helpful to a correct understanding of it. So eloquence has never been satisfactorily explained. One man gets up before us with a physique as perfect as that of Apollo Belvidere, his head and face of classic mold, his voice attuned like that of an organ, his ideas original and grand, and his action faultless—and we feel his power, we are entranced as by the spell of a magician. We say this is eloquence. So it is. But another comes without a single feature in his bodily appearance to recommend him, and claims a hearing. He is under size, or tall and ungainly, his head defiant of the acknowledged rules of phrenology, his eye rather expressionless than otherwise, his voice squeaky or harsh, his ideas at first are commonplace and his action violates all grace, and yet, as the man speaks, he gradually gains your attention, disarms your prejudices, wins your favor, until he penetrates you as with a flame of fire, and you melt before him, or he sweeps you away as with a whirlwind, and, regardless of the question as to whether he is logical or graceful, you are borne down. Here, too, is eloquence; you feel it. Sharp as is the contrast between the two men, there is one thing in which they are the same. They possess the strange power of transfusing their hearers with their own personality, so that the hearers think and feel as they do. It is something—a spark—which inheres in the original structure of the mind. It is born in a man, and not acquired.

Such was the endowment of Bishop Simpson. This spark lightened with its flame the whole man, soul and body. Every thing he did, he did eloquently. He thought, wrote, spoke, moved as an orator. In scanning the files of the "Western Christian Advocate" for the four years he was editor, one will find the same essential features in his editorials which all along distinguished his spoken discourses. They are suffused with a warmth which puts the soul aglow with the vitality of the man who is behind the pen. In all his words, looks, and actions, whether he talked familiarly with a friend or two, or looked calmly upon an audience before rising to speak, or stooped to kiss a child or to grasp a brother's hand in passing, there was a gleam of the inward light. Men will say it was sympathy with mankind, earnestness, a losing of

himself in his subject and for others. All true; it was all this, and something besides. To Bishop Simpson's oratory may be felicitously applied the language which Mr. Curtis uses in his oration on Wendell Phillips: "Unconsciously and surely the ear and heart were charmed. How was it done? Ah, how did Mozart do it, how Raphael? The secret of the rose's sweetness, of the bird's ecstasy, of the sunset's glory—that is the secret of genius and of eloquence. . . . Like an illuminating vase of odors, he glowed with concentrated and perfumed fire. The divine energy of his conviction utterly possessed him and his."

"*Pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in his cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,  
That one might almost say his body thought!*"

Thousands who have listened to Bishop Simpson will recall many illustrations of this singular power. A leading educator of our Church heard him soon after his election to the episcopacy on his first visit to New England. The theme was "The Victory of Faith." He says: "I stood in the aisle of the church during the entire time, from one hour and a half to two hours, wholly insensible of the flight of time." On another occasion, this gentleman himself had preached on Sunday morning at one of the Bishop's Conferences, the Bishop being unable to preach. After the ordination, the Bishop began to exhort, and in a few minutes the whole audience was convulsed with emotion: preachers and people laughed and wept as though beside themselves. Those who attended the reunion of the Ohio and Cincinnati Conferences at Chillicothe, O., during the war (1864, perhaps) will never forget the scene. Bishop Simpson had been addressing the joint bodies upon the issues before the country, and in his peroration he turned to the "Stars and Stripes" above him, and, taking hold of its folds, he burst into a thrilling apostrophe to the old flag. The effect was electrical; the ministers shouted, wept, stamped, embraced each other, and, it was afterward reported, some even rolled over on the floor. The scene was simply indescribable.

It was our privilege to hear Charles Sumner and Bishop Simpson in New York about the same week, during the exciting presidential campaign of 1864. Mr. Sumner spoke in

Cooper Union. The audience was select. The oration was masterly. Beginning with a description of two ships which steered for the American coast, one from a port of England freighted with the Puritans seeking freedom in the New World, the other from the coast of Africa freighted with negroes doomed to servitude; he went on to trace the rise and progress of the great controversy between freedom and slavery up to that hour, and the issue that was then upon us. Throughout, the sentences were compact, the argument conclusive, and the rhetoric perfect. Every body was convinced, but there was little or no emotion. Bishop Simpson spoke to a vast concourse in the Academy of Music on the value of the Union. The argument was an aggregation of facts, grouped in such order and so luminously and forcibly put that men bit their lips, clenched their fists, or stamped, shouted, and wept, as if to say, ‘It is so, the Union never shall be sundered.’ For logical precision and classical finish his oration was not the equal of Sumner’s; and yet in effect it far excelled it, and that, too, with many thoughtful people.

Another recollection: it was our good fortune to hear the Bishop when he preached as our representative before the British Wesleyan Conference at Burslem, England, in 1879. Bishop Foster, then Dr. Foster, his co-delegate, said to me, “Let us go up into the gallery, and take seats where we can see the effect of the sermon on the Conference.” And so we took seats in one end of the deep gallery of the old chapel, whence we could overlook the platform on which sat the “one hundred,” and have a general view of the audience. The preacher’s text was: “But none of these things move me,” etc. Acts xx, 24. I do not remember the order of the sermon. He discussed a call to the ministry—gave a graphic picture of Paul’s career—his trials and successes—pausing as the apostle was confronted by each successive conflict, and hearing him cry, “But none of these things move me.” We followed with the rest, and were glad to see that our great Bishop was carrying the British with him. When his explanations and arguments were well through, the antitheses and climaxes made, suddenly he adverted to his own call to preach. He depicted his youth, his orphanage, his long struggles. Finally the Spirit of God fastened the conviction upon him, and now the difficulty was

to break it to his mother. How would she be affected by it? Could she give him up? Could he ever leave her? He was her only son and child. Approaching her one day, he said, "Mother, I think I shall have to preach." Without hesitation she said, "Why, Matthew, I have been expecting this since you were a child. Your father and I dedicated you to God when you were born." At this recital my heart went to my throat, my eyes overflowed. I tried to hide my emotions from Dr. Foster, but as I did so I glanced at him; and he, if possible, was more overcome than I was. We both wept, forgetful of others. We also, like the rest, had fallen under the spell of the great preacher; this, too, when we had meant to study in cold blood the secret of his power over an audience.

After such experiences it were easy to concede him to be a modern Chrysostom. Of that great ancient preacher, Suidas observes that "he had a tongue which exceeded the cataracts of the Nile in fluency, so that he delivered many of his panegyries on the martyrs extempore without the least hesitation. His hearers were sometimes rapt in such profound attention that pickpockets took advantage of it; sometimes they were melted to tears, or beat their breasts and faces, and uttered groans and cries to heaven for mercy; at other times they clapped their hands or shouted."\*

In concluding this rapid sketch, a few points in summing up seem to be worthy of special note:

He is an example of the high achievements possible to a well-endowed, industrious, painstaking, and devout youth. He began life an orphan boy, with no rich and influential friends, and advanced to the most commanding position. There were no abrupt breaks in his career; so far as we can see, no serious mistakes. He moved steadily and serenely forward and upward, gathering strength and increasing in influence until the hour of his death. If he possessed natural gifts above the average youths, he did not seem to know it, and certainly he never trusted to mere genius for success. His application to all work was incessant. He was thoroughly honest in the use of time and means. When he first began to preach he was so simple and guileless that he conscientiously abstained from special preparation for preaching. He did not

\* "Life of St. Chrysostom," by W. R. W. Stephens, M. A., London.

select his text or premeditate his subject before entering the pulpit, deeming it necessary that he should absolutely trust the Lord both for his text and his sermon. "Open thy mouth and I will fill it." But he learned better as he grew older, and when a more excellent way opened to him, he was equally honest in following it. In those earlier years he was not as uniformly effective in his ministrations as afterward. Judging from a comment in the unpublished journal of the late Bishop Waugh, he made comparative failures in the pulpit even after he was a professor at Meadville. "Wheeling, Va.—Heard Prof. Simpson preach in the evening—it was only a tolerable performance." But he studied and triumphed. No young man can fully know what stuff he is made of until he has studied with all his might, and studied *persistently*.

In the matter of physical advantages he has also illustrated the efficiency of an intelligent, straightforward courage. Instead of yielding to an early tendency to pulmonary disease, and desisting from preaching, he persevered and cured it. "Open-air exercise, continuous and *judicious* speaking, saved me, as I believe, from a premature death," he has more than once been heard to say. Nor was there any thing in his person, until it expanded and glowed with the inspiration of an audience, which impressed one with his power. He would never have been picked out of an assembly, by those who knew him not, as a great man. His form was tall, but slight and stooped; his head was small for the size of his body, with a low forehead, projecting shaggy eyebrows, and there was not the dome-like cranium which is popularly associated with the highest intellects. His eyes, when he was in repose, were bright enough, but not at all piercing, and were rather quiet, and indicative of kindly, benevolent feeling, than of incisive thought and great will-power. It was not until he was fully aroused and on fire with some mighty subject that you had "the warrior's eye beneath the philosopher's brow." Then the whole form and features, like some ancient classic urn, shone resplendent from the brightness within. Who can ever forget his looks as, thus transfigured, he spoke to us of Christ and heaven, until the gates of paradise seemed to open above him, and we with him gazed in at the celestial glory and saw the King in his beauty.

Bishop Simpson was a remarkable example of the union of the highest mental qualities in the most perfect harmony. He was both a philosopher and an orator. His brilliant eloquence was associated with profound and far-reaching thought. His career is a standing refutation of the baseless assumption that a man cannot be a popular preacher and a deep, close thinker. "Genius," says Guizot, "is bound to follow human nature in all its developments. Its strength consists in finding within itself the means of satisfying the whole of the public. It should exist for all, and should suffice at once for the wants of the masses and for the requirements of the most exalted mind." There were those who were ready to say of Dr. Dyer, before his profound practical wisdom was wrought into the immortal Methodist missionary scheme, that he was simply an "inspired declaimer." And I presume there are some persons sufficiently narrow to deny to the most eloquent orator of England that he is at the same time the most sagacious, comprehensive statesman. Mr. Gladstone could not to day be the mightiest factor in British and continental polities without his popular oratory; nor would his eloquence avail unless sustained by the deepest and clearest insight into the principles which underlie both divine and human governments. Bishop Simpson was capable of the keenest analysis and the most abstruse discussions, as his articles on conscience and kindred topics, written when he was an editor, abundantly show. He could have excelled as a metaphysician, if metaphysics had been his chosen field; and had he devoted himself to the natural sciences in which he began as a college professor, he might have become a Henry, a Silliman, or possibly an Agassiz. He had an eye for principles whichever way he turned. It was this power of discernment and penetration that so stamped with common sense all he did that some, in characterizing his intellectual make-up, have been attracted more by his *judiciousness* than by all else.

Another fact which is well worthy of note is, that there is not, and need not be in this age or any age, a decline in the power and influence of the pulpit. The sustained popularity of Bishop Simpson and Mr. Spurgeon for so many years, not to name others, shows that when the human heart is rightly addressed it will respond. To say nothing of the great truths—pardon,

holiness, providence, and heaven, which form the substance of preaching and which are so indispensable to the soul—preaching, when really eloquent, appeals to the aesthetic nature of man. As an art it has its foundation in the higher susceptibilities of human nature, precisely as music or painting or any other fine art has. Indeed, there is no power like the power of the tongue. There is nothing in the whole range of nature which gives such satisfaction as talking. The faculty of speech is man's noblest endowment.

People love to talk and to be talked to, and hence conversation is the most agreeable relaxation, and that which usually caps all other exercises. Where preaching, rising upon the conversational tone and manner as a basis, keeps true to nature, it never can cease to be attractive. The vice of the pulpit has been an artificial, stilted, professional style of delivery. The same may apply too well to the rhetorical structure of sermons. But average people will listen to almost any thing which is spoken in a natural manner. The soul will always kindle to eloquent thoughts, eloquently spoken. And if preachers ignore this vantage ground which the God of nature has given them, in the love which is implanted in all men for the beautiful, and shall fail to meet its requirements, then surely must the pulpit decay. It is not enough for men called of God to skulk under the cover that the Gospel is indispensable to mankind, and that men must be damned if they do not listen to it. No honest preacher wants to shield his neglect of study and culture under the sacredness and importance of his message; on the contrary, the more he is impressed with its holy and stupendous character the more he yearns so to present it as that, in his manner at least, there shall be nothing to repel, but every thing to attract, those to whom his message is to be either a savor of life unto life or a savor of death unto death. God's great method of saving the world by preaching is so grounded in supernatural and natural reasons as that there need never be a decadence of the pulpit. Such examples as that of Bishop Simpson in our own times strikingly illustrate the position. Nothing but lack of moral convictions, spiritual earnestness, and professional enthusiasm can bring about a falling away from the eloquence of the fathers in the Gospel.

THEOLOGY LIBRARY  
CLAREMONT, CALIF.

A9604







A91.04

41583





BX Ridgaway, Henry Bascom, 1830-1895.  
8495 Bishop Simpson. [n.p., 1885?]  
S55 29p. port. 22cm.  
R5  
Cover title.  
"From the Methodist review, January, 1885."  
  
1. Simpson, Matthew, Bp., 1811-1884. I.  
Title.

A6904

CCSC/mmb

